

## SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

### Proposed Simco Training Area and BLM ROW

This information package summarizes the Idaho Army National Guard's (IDARNG) proposal to use lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) for military maneuver training activities (**Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4**). The proposed training area is approximately 28,430-acres, and is located east of Simco Road in Elmore County, adjacent to the Orchard Combat Training Center (OCTC). The proposed training area is required by the IDARNG to offset reduced availability of accessible maneuver training lands within the OCTC in order to meet Department of the Army (DoA) training requirements outlined under Field Manual (FM) 3-96, and Training Circular (TC) 25-1, and to prepare for and ensure troop combat readiness and safety.

The proposed training area is approximately 28,430-acres, and is located east of Simco Road in Elmore County (**Figure 1**). The proposed action would require rights-of-way (ROW) on 12,776-acres of BLM, 555-acres of BOR, and a long-term lease on 15,097-acres of IDL lands (**Figures 1 and 2**). The majority of the site (22,919-acres or 74%) is found within the boundaries of the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). The residual 7,510-acres (26%) is outside the NCA (**Figure 2**). Training activities would be managed under the BLM's 2008 resource management plan (RMP), IDARNG's 2021 Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP), 2020 Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan (ICRMP), and other internal military requirements.

As this is a federal action, it must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to determine potential environmental consequences. The purpose of this document is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA process. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA), with a final decision estimated in August of 2021. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the IDARNG and BLM's purpose and need.

### **Background**

The mission of the IDARNG and the OCTC (**Figure 1**) is to provide training lands and Annual Training facilities first to the IDANG and Reserve Forces, and then to other government and civilian organizations, training corps departments, and public education institutions to the extent that there is no interference with existing military training activities. The OCTC is the primary training area for IDARNG-assigned units. It is also one of the largest heavy force (armor/mechanized) training areas in the United States. The OCTC provides training for both the federal and state missions of the IDARNG. The state missions include providing assistance as requested to the Governor during State emergencies, including natural disasters, civil disturbance, or terrorist attacks. During times of national emergencies, the President reserves the right to mobilize the National Guard, putting them in federal duty status. The OCTC has the following missions:

- Providing a training area for National Guard (NG), Reserve, and Active Military Forces
- Providing assistance, facilities, and training areas for logistical support to units conducting Inactive Duty Training (IDT) and Annual Training (AT)
- Providing small arms and crew-served weapons qualification ranges and facilities
- Providing maneuver areas suitable for training heavy armor and mechanized units
- Providing range facilities for M1A1 and M1A2 tank series and Bradley fighting vehicles
- Providing for artillery gunnery and maneuver
- Providing for AH-64 Apache attack helicopter gunnery
- Providing or coordinating organizational and direct support maintenance facilities for units conducting training
- Providing training areas and facilities to local law enforcement agencies, civil defense organizations,

The mission of the BLM is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Established in 1993 with the enactment of Public Law (PL) 103-64, the NCA is located in southwestern Idaho, comprising more than 483,000 acres and including portions of Ada, Canyon, Elmore, and Owyhee counties. The NCA was established, and is managed to provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats and the natural and environmental resources and values associated therewith, and of the scientific, cultural, and educational resources and values of the public lands in the conservation area.

The mission of the IDL is to manage Idaho's endowment assets to maximize long-term financial returns to public schools and other trust beneficiaries, and to provide professional assistance to the citizens of Idaho to use, protect and sustain their natural resources.

### **Purpose and Need for Actions**

#### ***IDARNG***

The purpose of the IDARNG's proposed action is to offset the loss of available heavy maneuver training lands within the OCTC associated with the BLM management guidance outlined in their 2008 RMP, and make available a sufficient amount of accessible, heavy maneuver training lands to support the mission of the IDARNG and Department of Defense (DoD). The BLM's 2008 RMP management guidelines required that military maneuver activities be restricted to areas with less than 10% shrub cover. As such, the amount of available/useable military maneuver training lands within the OCTC boundary was reduced from roughly 89,000 acres to approximately 35,000 acres, a reduction of roughly 54,000 acres or 62% of the historically available area. Coupled with increasing training conflicts from public use of the OCTC, the amount of available and affective heavy maneuver training lands within the current OCTC boundary is insufficient to meet the existing mission requirements of the DoD and IDARNG.

The additional training lands are needed to:

- Offset the loss of available maneuver training lands within the existing OCTC boundary.
- Address increasing training conflicts associated with the growing public use of the OCTC.
- Meet IDARNG mission and DoD and DoA training requirements outlined in FM 3-96, TC 25-1, and to prepare for and ensure troop combat readiness.
- Allow the Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) to complete an Exportable Combat Training Capability (xCTC) program within 30 days to better prepare for Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) and achieve Mission Essential Task List (METL) proficiency. Department of Defense Instruction Number 1215.06 prevents Guard brigades from keeping Soldiers on orders for more than 30 days during Annual Training, thereby reducing Guard BCTs from achieving METL proficiency. National Guard Regulation (NGR) 350-1 meanwhile encourages all elements of a unit to train together whenever possible. Current land holdings in the OCTC do not allow for a BCT to complete xCTC and other mandated collective training within 30 days.
- Provide the capability for LSCO and training over realistic distances all of which contribute to the overall strategic readiness of the force.
- Support sustainable range practices by resting and rotating areas impacted by military training activities, i.e. allowing vegetative regeneration and recovery in areas impacted.

#### ***BLM***

The BLM's purpose of the proposed action is to decide whether to grant authorizations on 12,776-acres of BLM and 555-acres of BOR-managed lands to the IDARNG for maneuver training activities, and to construct, use, and maintain 12.7-miles of unpaved roadway and associated infrastructure projects within the proposed Simco Training Area (**Figure 3 and 4**).

The need for the action is for BLM to respond to IDARNG applications for use of Federally managed public lands pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), 43 United State Code (U.S.C.) § 1701 et seq. and the BLM's ROW regulations, 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 2800.

### **Proposed Action**

The IDARNG is coordinating with the BLM and IDL to establish long-term agreements on approximately 28,430 acres in Elmore County Idaho (**Figure 1, 2, 3, and 4**). The IDARNG is requesting a ROW from the BLM on 13,331-acres (12,776-acres of BLM and 555-acres of BOR), including 12.7 miles or unpaved road, and a lease agreement with the IDL on 15,097-acre. The agreements are required to access, use, and maintain these lands, and allow the IDARNG to make alterations to existing infrastructure to balance existing uses and management requirements with proposed military maneuver and engineering activities (**Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4**). The proposed military training activities would meet DoD training requirements outlined in FM 3-96 and TC 25-1.

The type, timing, and management of military maneuver training activities conducted within the proposed project area would be the same as those currently conducted within the OCTC. However, the overall training footprint would be dispersed over a larger area. Annual training operations could occur from March through November, but are normally limited to May through August based on self-imposed soil moisture limitations implemented by the IDARNG. Total annual training operations would be limited to eight (8) mechanized or armor companies (125 tracked vehicles), with oppositional forces and support vehicles. Annual training operations would include off-road maneuver training activities and isolated engineering tasks conducted outside established off-limits areas. Engineering tasks would be limited to 10 acres of temporary disturbance on BLM lands and 20 acres of disturbance on IDL lands annually.

There would be no live fire training operations of any kind within the proposed area. Force-on-force operations would only use blank fire and multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES), or similar non-live fire systems for training purposes. Units operating in the area could remain overnight on one of three proposed assembly areas (20-acres each) in order to conduct multi-day training events. Two of the three sites are located on BLM lands, and one is located on IDL lands (**Figure 3 and 4**).

The IDARNG would actively support the proposed training area in coordination with BLM and IDL staff for natural resources, cultural resources, and wildland fire suppression. Like the OCTC, active management of these resources are required under Army Regulation (AR) 350-19, AR 200-1, and the IDARNG's INRMP, ICRMP, and associated resource management documents. The IDARNG would also provide increased resources (funding, staff, equipment, infrastructure, etc.) for monitoring and protection of natural and cultural resources, active rehabilitation and restoration of habitat, control of invasive and noxious weeds, and wildland fire suppression and rehabilitation.

Some changes to existing infrastructure (**Figure 3**), including roads, fences, gates and cattle guards, water system, and others would be required for training purposes. Proposed changes to the infrastructure are identified in **Figure 4** and discussed below. The IDARNG will coordinate with the BLM, IDL, and the existing grazing permittee to make these modifications as needed. The IDARNG understands that changes to existing infrastructure may require funding to reimburse the permittee for infrastructure that they developed. Similarly, any damages to property, including livestock, attributed to military training activities shall be reimbursed per the final agreements.

The proposed changes to fences, gates, and cattle crossing infrastructure include the net removal of approximately 37,600 linear feet (lf) (7.1 miles) of four-strand barbed wire fence. This includes the removal of 74,500 lf (14.0 miles) of fence to allow for greater flexibility in maneuver training activities, but up to 36,900 lf (6.9 miles) of new fence to maintain livestock pastures and to protect resources associated with off-limits areas. Two existing range gates would also be upgraded to 13-foot swinging

metal gates (26 total feet), to allow for vehicle access and egress, and up to 25 additional cattle guards could be added to allow easier vehicle movement throughout the allotments/pastures while limiting livestock movement.

The existing permittee using the area (Simplot) has developed an extensive water system (9.8 miles of pvc pipe) located on the IDL lands. To reduce impacts to the water line, the IDARNG would work with Simplot to replace the water line with polyline buried under a minimum of 18-inches of crushed gravel. In addition to the irrigation system, there are 18 existing livestock water troughs and one water tank would require protection measures. Ten-foot high Seibert stakes (reflective poles) may be placed around each trough and tank to protect the site while still allowing livestock and the permittee access.

The IDARNG would also take similar measures to delineate and protect an existing Idaho Power 230 kV overhead electrical transmission line. The transmission line would be protected by enhancing the two-track adjacent to the line (physical delineation) and putting reflective markers on each pole, with additional visible lights attached at vehicle height to every other pole during nighttime training activities. The IDARNG will also integrate, to the extent possible, the power line, all off-limits sites, and any areas of concern into the Joint Battle Command Platform (JBCEP). This is a location-based system that notifies the user when they are in proximity of a defined area.

Access to the proposed training site would occur at Simco Road and the Mountain Home access points (**Figure 3**). The Simco Road access point would be the primary access and egress point for training vehicles (tracked and wheeled). The secondary access points would be located off the NW Bypass Road. All access points would be gated, but the use of locks will be at the discretion of, and in accordance with, the policies of the land managers.

### **Public Input Needed**

Public scoping for the proposed action began on March 5, 2021. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 5, 2021, and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. It is anticipated that a preliminary EA will be made available for public comment sometime in June of 2021. Public scoping comments sent electronically should be sent to **[ng.id.idarng.list.ngid-emo@mail.mil](mailto:ng.id.idarng.list.ngid-emo@mail.mil)** or **[blm\\_id\\_fourriversoffice@blm.gov](mailto:blm_id_fourriversoffice@blm.gov)** with the title of this project in the subject line.

### **Public Meetings (Virtual)**

In addition to this project scoping document, the BLM and IDARNG will together host two virtual public scoping meetings via Zoom on March 17, 2021. The virtual meeting will include a presentation of the project proposal with an opportunity for the public to submit questions to specialists. Pre-registration is required, after which a confirmation email will be sent with information on how to join the meeting. You can register for the Zoom meeting on the BLM's ePlanning site <https://go.usa.gov/xsbJZ>.

Additional information about the proposed action can also be found at the IDARNG website **<https://emomil.imd.idaho.gov/>** (Documents for Review), or the BLM website **<https://go.usa.gov/xsbJZ>**.

**Please send any written comments to:**

Idaho Army National Guard  
Environmental Management Office  
Attn: Charles Baun  
4715 S. Byrd St., Bldg. 518  
Boise, Idaho 83705-8095

Or

Bureau of Land Management  
Attn: Charlotte Alexander  
3948 Development Ave.  
Boise, ID 83705

*Before including address, phone number, email-address, or any other personal identifying information in your comments, be advised that your entire comment, including personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While individuals may request that the BLM withhold personal identifying information from public view, the BLM cannot guarantee it will be able to do so. If you wish us to withhold your personal information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, available for public disclosure in their entirety.*

**Attached Figures:**

Figure Legend  
Figure 1: Vicinity Map  
Figure 2: Ownership Map  
Figure 3: Existing Infrastructure  
Figure 4: Proposed Infrastructure